

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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NRC Cannot Locate Fuel Rods, Which Could Be Used in Dirty Bombs *NRC Responds To Rep. Markey's Inquiry into Missing Nuclear Fuel at Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant*

Washington, DC: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the panel which oversees nuclear power regulation, today released the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC's) response to his April 22, 2004 letter regarding missing nuclear rods from the spent fuel storage pool at the Vermont Yankee Nuclear power plant

"The NRC says it has no idea where the spent nuclear fuel is, but insists that it is safe, wherever it is. This sounds like a faith-based approach to nuclear security to me," said Rep. Markey. "It is time for the NRC to crack down on those responsible for these materials, implement new security regulations, and impose high penalties for those who don't comply."

On April 22, 2004, reports indicated that 2 pieces of spent nuclear fuel rods were missing from Entergy's Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. Rep. Markey sent a letter to the NRC (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_dirtybombs_ltr040422.pdf) requesting information. Rep. Markey also sent letters to the NRC in December 2000 regarding the two radioactive spent fuel rods that were missing from the Millstone Nuclear Power Station Unit 1 (see http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_nuclear_ltr001220.pdf, http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_terrorism_ltr011204.pdf).

After an extensive investigation that cost \$9 million, Millstone's licensee concluded that the fuel rods in this matter were "somewhere" – perhaps in South Carolina, perhaps in Washington State, perhaps still in Connecticut. The Commission then concluded that even though it had no idea where the fuel rods were, they did not pose a public health risk to anyone. Despite that fact that the rods were never found, the Commission fined the plant operator only \$288,000 for its lax nuclear materials accounting and oversight.

The NRC response to the Congressman's April 22 letter on Vermont Yankee indicated that:

- The fuel rods were found to be missing after the NRC identified problems with the method used by Entergy to perform physical inventories of its spent nuclear fuel. A follow-up inspection found that while the storage container for the spent nuclear fuel remained in the spent fuel pool, the spent fuel itself was missing. The Commission and the licensee continue to investigate the matter to determine where the materials are and how they went missing in the first place.
- "If radioactive material typical of a fuel rod segment were used in a dirty bomb, the radioactive material could contaminate an area of a few city blocks or more, depending on the size of the explosive, the amount of radioactive material used, and weather conditions."

- The last time Vermont Yankee physically verified the whereabouts of the missing spent fuel pieces was January 1980. While an annual inventory of spent nuclear fuel was performed by the company, “the effectiveness of the inventory is in question.”
- In 1988, the NRC stopped inspecting storage of spent nuclear fuel in order to allocate its resources to matters it felt were more “risk-significant”. It did not resume these inspections until after September 11, 2001.
- It took more than 3 years after the 2 large pieces of spent nuclear fuel were reported missing from the Millstone Nuclear Power Station in November 2000 for the NRC to issue instructions to licensees to improve their spent nuclear fuel material control and accounting.

Rep. Markey is the author of the Dirty Bomb Prevention Act and has repeatedly attempted to prod the NRC into action on the problem of unaccounted-for dirty bomb materials. For more information on the Dirty Bomb Prevention Act and the problem of missing dirty bomb materials, please go to <http://www.house.gov/markey/dirtybombs.htm>.

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